Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Susan Flader

Date of Interview: May 9, 2011

Location of Interview: Aldo Leopold Center, Baraboo Wisconsin

Interviewer: Stephen Laubach

Most Important Projects: The Aldo Leopold Foundation, research in environmental history

Brief Summary of Interview: The following is an interview of Dr. Susan Flader, environmental historian and Aldo Leopold Scholar at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Susan talks about her graduate work in history at Stanford and at the University of Wisconsin, and how she got to know the Leopold family. She talks about her informal visits to the Leopold Shack starting in the early 1960s when she did her PhD research on Aldo Leopold and got to know Leopold's widow Estella as well as her work much later as a member of the board of the Leopold Foundation. She discusses Leopold's work at the Shack in the context of his career experiences, and she considers changes in cooperative conservation efforts in the United States. She concludes by sharing her vision for the future of the Leopold Foundation.

Key: I (Interviewer) = Stephen Laubach; R (Responder) = Susan Flader

I: So, today is Monday, May 9th [2011] and I'm interviewing Susan Flader for the Leopold Memorial Reserve History Project. In advance, I'll say, "thank you."

R: Thank you.

I: And, uh, I emailed you a list of questions, but I actually will kind of- I'm not gonna stick too closely to that; it's just a rough guide.

R: Many of them are questions that I'm not directly familiar with. I was observing from- from the sidelines.

I: Yeah.

R: And I was here during the years from about the late 1960s until '73 and then coming back frequently after that.

I: Right.

R: So I- I was aware of what was happening from then on in a general way, but not as one who was getting regular mailings or anything like that.

I: Right. And actually, my first question is quite general. If I could get the- some of the specifics about how you are connected with the reserve and have- I know you've been on the board and on the publications board, um, but some of the ways that you have been connected with the reserve. And- and from what I've seen, a lot of it is- I've seen the guest books that you were a frequent visitor as a friend, more than as- at least initially- as opposed to being someone involved and drafting the agreement and things like that.

R: Yes. I had no connection with drafting the agreement. I was working in the- from the mid-1960s on, on a biographical study of Aldo Leopold. And that resulted in two books in the early 1970s: "The Sand Country of Aldo Leopold" and there's an interesting story there that might be relevant to this project and, uh, Thinking Like a Mountain, which was the- subtitled, Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude toward Deer, Wolves and Forests. That was my dissertation at Stanford University, but I did all of the work here in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is my home state and I had family in Wisconsin from the time I was born until the present, and frequently came back to visit, but I also was an undergraduate history major at the University of Wisconsin before I went out to Stanford.

I: Okay.

R: And then would come back in the summers to work on this project, and then finally full time in about 1967.

I: What years were you at UW?

R: I was there as an undergraduate from 1959 to '63.

I: Okay.

R: Then I came back summers after that because I got involved in doing the Leopold work that first summer after that, 1964, and then after I finished my comprehensive exams at Stanford, came back to live in Madison and took more courses in environmental- all different aspects of environmental studies that were not available at Stanford, but were at Wisconsin. I actually ended up sitting in on more courses at the University of Wisconsin, uh, graduate level than appeared on my entire Stanford transcript, for master's and PhD.

I: Yeah. And can you describe some of your first trips to the shack?

R: Yes- I'm not sure that I remember the details of my first trip, but it would certainly have been with Mrs. Leopold, Aldo's widow-

I: Mmhm.

R: -when I started working on Leopold, getting interested in it, and came to the university to see if there might be any materials at the University of Wisconsin Archives they said, "Yes, there are, but you're gonna have to get permission to use them." "Permission from whom?" And it turned out to be Mrs. Leopold. And it had never occurred to me that Aldo Leopold, who died in 1948, might still have somebody, you know, his wife, living in Madison-

I: Right.

R: -and his children. I was pretty naive in those days.

I: Right, right.

R: So I met her immediately, before I ever looked at the first box of Leopold materials, and she was very friendly and encouraging. I'm sure that the first time I came to the Shack, it would've been with her.

I: Okay.

R: And I came many times with her, and often when other people- her children or other people that she thought I should meet- were visiting, she would call me and I'd meet them either at her house or coming out to the shack for shack trips.

I: Yeah.

R: And then I often would bring her out just because she loved to come out, so the two of us would often come alone, also.

I: Yeah. And, um, of course I heard on Green Fire your story about hearing the sand hill cranes and somehow knowing what you were hearing.

R: Mmhm.

I: What are some other memories you have of your visits during that period?

R: Well, what I- what I especially remember is that every time I came with somebody from the family, and not so much with Mrs. Leopold, but with any of the children, there was always a work project.

I: Yeah.

R: That was part of the family heritage. And it usually had something to do with- with pruning or planting or something that today we would put in the realm of ecological restoration. Although we never finished any of these, you know we worked on them for what hours we had, which was not usually very long-

I: Right.

R: And there was a lot of work to be done on the reserve that wasn't being done in those years when the children were all off-

I: Right.

R: -starting their careers.

I: Right. So, uh, early to mid-1960s.

R: Yeah. But that heritage of a work project was- was, you know, very important. Um, the Dutch oven cooking, the guitars if the children- any of the children were around, they always had a guitar and singing and usually the Spanish songs. And then, uh, if we were to- occasionally, we came with someone who was not a- you know, immediate family or close friend who was coming to the shack for the first time, and Mrs. Leopold always had to prepare people for that. And her usual way of saying it is, "Now this is a very simple place. We don't have any curtains on the windows."

I: I described that in the opening of the chapter with the family of how the children- Nina and her siblings- as high schoolers or maybe early college that somehow this took precedence, this very rustic lodging, over other- what could be considered more important things at that age, that some of these traditions were clearly passed on to them and appreciated.

R: Yes. And of course the observation of animal tracks or birds or anything- You know, that was always very much a part of the day. And any of those observations would go into the journal as well, even after Leopold's death, although the journals were not as consistent after that.

I: Yeah. Yeah, I noticed one that said, "1955-56." I guess they filled them up every two years, but that one ended up taking until 1975 when Nina and Charlie came, so the inference for me

was that they had the expectation that things would get filled up every two years, and then it slowed down a little bit during those years.

R: Or that it was the year 1955-56 that was being studied, maybe. Started.

I: Yeah.

R: I'm not- I'm not sure about that, but those years, I don't think there was many visits out here. There- Mrs. Leopold would come out with friends-

I: Right.

R: -but I don't think as frequently.

I: And from the research I've done, Mrs. Leopold was in regular contact with Reed Coleman about, um, and she saw a need for- for ways to protect the land or early in the years of the reserve when there were problems with people coming and not following rules or just showing up.

R: Yeah. I think most of that contact was probably through his mother, Catherine Coleman, who was a good friend of- of Estella Leopold.

I: Yeah, there were some interesting entries of her and Catherine taking a trip to the shack on a hot July day. But my question there was, um, it seems like the family was very busy with other things. Mrs. Leopold kind of kept an eye on what was happening with that until Nina and Charlie came back, but the family was a little bit more hands off until then.

R: They were often away, and every one of them engaged in a very demanding career in some other part of the country.

I: Yeah. So that was kind of the way I interpreted that as well. But then after that point, obviously, with Nina and Charlie, then the family took on a much, much greater role.

R: Yes.

I: And at what point did you begin participating in terms of being a board member and-

R: Oh, that was much later. That wasn't until 2001.

I: Okay.

R: The family, uh, had a trust arrangement for their mother, and for the royalties from Sand County Almanac, and then they started the Aldo Leopold Foundation, which was a family foundation, continued that arrangement, but their mother was no longer living at that time. Now, they were concerned about the property and the literary estate, and that began in 1982 and I was kind of aware that they were meeting annually. They would usually meet around the time of

Luna's birthday, I think, October 8th-

I: Yup, mmhm.

R: -for family meetings. And I was not very often included in those. I mean I- you know, it was family, and I was not living in Wisconsin; I was in Missouri. But, in the '90s, and I'm not sure exactly when, they began to think about developing the foundation-

I: Right.

R: -for more of a- of a function that might involve some people from- who were not on the board.

I: Right.

R: From- I mean, some people on the- either some advisors or some people from the- from- board members who were not family members, and I didn't review that part of the history for this- for this call, but I know that they brought a number of non-family board members onto the board in the late 1990s-

I: Right.

R: -and, uh, Estella and Nina occasionally asked me if I would be willing to be a board member. But I think it took them some years to sell that idea to whoever it was making the decisions.

I: Right, right.

R: So it was 2001 before I came on.

I: Okay. So I'm- I'm jumping around a little bit, but I want to get kind of a timeline of your informal involvement and then your formal involvement and then we can go back to some of these other questions. So after you joined the board, what were some of the, um, some of the areas that you particularly focused on as a board member?

R: Well I- even before I became a board member, became involved on what they called the "Publications Committee," which was dealing with proposals for various kinds of publications regarding Leopold, and especially things that would involve unpublished materials. So, there was a committee that was mostly board members, but I was the chair of it as a non-board member, and that was the- that was the avenue through which I initially became involved. Once I got on the board, I was involved in most aspects, but especially publication, education, and outreach, and the development program to start raising money. I wasn't on the committee, but we were- the board, as a whole was involved in those materials, and I began to do some- some writing and editing to help that process along.

I: Mmhm, okay. I'd like to come back to this in a little bit. But you had mentioned an interesting story about "The Sand Country of Aldo Leopold"-

R: Yes, the reason it's called, "The Sand Country of Aldo Leopold"- this was a Sierra Club book with photographs. It was part of their exhibit format series and I was aware of the- of the book, and not involved in it; they had hired somebody else to do the- the essay, and I remember, having been a little bit concerned about why somebody who was a- you know, who didn't know anything about Leopold was being hired to do that essay. And of course I was naive. He was a freelance writer who was known to the editor-in-chief of Sierra Club books. Tony Wolf, I think, was his name. And he began working on the project, and the expectation of Sierra Club books was that he would come and he would talk to people who knew things, and he came to talk to me. And I said that I could show him were the papers were in the University of Wisconsin Archives, I said, "But I haven't worked on that part of the story," because my doctoral dissertation isn't dealing with what happened here at the shack. It's dealing with this relationship between deer, wolves, and forests in the Southwest and in Wisconsin in general, but the deer during Leopold's lifetime were in Northern Wisconsin. There were, you know, a few here at the Shack, but not- not very many. And Wolf realized that there was work to be done, and he wasn't really- you know, some freelance writers are very good at finding other people's work and just kind of rewriting it for a nice, hefty sum, and there wasn't anything that had been written on the Shack experience. And I've, you know, I was very interested in doing it, and I knew where all the material was. It would be a research project for me also. And finally, Tony Wolf apparently, just told the people at Sierra Club that he couldn't do it because it was going to take more time than they- than the money that they were paying him. Freelance writers get well-paid- some of them. Historians work for free, for the love of it.

I: I think I found that out. This project has taken on a life of its own for me.

R: Yeah, so I got a call from the editor-in-chief of Sierra Club books saying that Tony had decided that he just couldn’t do this, and would I be willing to do it and then Tony would edit it? Well, I didn't know what "editing" meant, but I said I would do it. And they- but the problem was they had already paid most of the money to Tony. He had already burned it up, deciding that he couldn't do it. So, could they pay me $1,000? Well, that was more than I had ever received for anything, any kind of a project, so that sounded okay to me. No, I have to tell you, I put in a lot more time and effort on that than they money they were paying me, and Tony got 20 times that much or more. But, in any case, I then did the research, and wrote the essay "Sand Country" and I- part of the bargain when I accepted it was that we would- their working title for the book was, I think, "The Sand County of Aldo Leopold" and I was acutely aware by this time that the family was very concerned about publicizing the Shack and the location of it and thereby attracting people when there was no family presence or no official presence on site to- to handle that kind of visitation. They simply did not want any map showing the location or anything that would attract people to the specific site, so I said, as a condition of doing this work, that I was going to write this more broadly, about the sand counties in general and the history of that area, and then the Leopold family experience at the Shack, but I was not going to identify it as to where it was. And there would be no maps in the book that would identify it as to where it was. There were maps identifying the sand-counties as a whole. And- and then I said, "And we won't even call it the 'sand county;' we'll call it- there is no sand county. We'll call it- I'd like to call it the 'sand country'" and I led from a theme in some of Leopold's unpublished material about the idea of country as the personality of the land. You know, the personal relationship that you have to it.

That was before he used the- the phrase, "the land ethic." It was- back in those days, he was thinking in terms of a conservation ethic. And later, when he used the term "land," it meant something quite different. It didn't really mean personality; it meant the whole system, the whole biotic community. But in any case, I led from some materials of his where he was making a distinction between land, as a locus of commodity production and country, which is the personality of the land, the relationship that you have with it, the sense of place. So that's what I was trying to deal with in my essay.

I: Okay.

R: But I think that's relevant to the whole beginnings of the reserve because the family was acutely aware that their mother was in Madison and getting older. And she couldn't be expected to control all of the potential visitation up here and they were- they were very concerned. Not that they didn't want to share it, but that they were very concerned about not being able to monitor what was happening-

I: Yeah.

R: And make sure that- that the visitation was appropriate.

I: Yeah, I came across a number of communications on that between Estella, Sr. and Reed, and Frank and Reed saying- the Historical Society wanted to post a plaque and Frank said, "No, no deal. Not gonna do that."

R: And you may know that in the early years of the- of the Leopold Memorial Reserve, which I think the family in general thought was a very good thing because it protected the Leopold lands, and helped to bring some measure of management of this whole landscape. They were also quite concerned that every time anybody came to visit, you know, through what was then the Louis Rollin Head Foundation, the locus- the focal point of it was always the shack. And they were- they were quite concerned about that became they thought that a lot of those people would eventually come back on their own-

I: Right.

R: -and again, that it would be a problem. **Stopped here – minute 21:47.** They were- their example of something that they did not want this property to turn into was Walden Pond.

I: I mentioned that on the book. I- I haven't found a publication, but I said, you know, the family- repeatedly it comes up that they're really concerned and my comparison was- because I've been there myself-

R: But the family always talked about that. They had all been there. They had seen all those hordes of people. They had seen the trampling around the pond, you know, the- they just did not want that.

I: Yeah.

R: And that was- I think that was very much in all of their minds.

I: And, um, as I was thinking about this, so the legacy center here indicates kind of a new chapter in how do you handle the volume of people who want to come to this place?

R: Yeah, and part of the idea here is that we're gonna develop a system of trails that goes out from here-

I: Oh, okay.

R: -so that the expectation is not that everybody who comes here would necessarily go to the Shack. In other words, there's something here that's much more important; there's a landscape and a process of ecological restoration with a history that needs to be interpreted. And, it doesn't need to be interpreted right there at the Shack. So that in time, there might be, you know, the hope is that they'll be able to control the numbers of people and prevent overuse of that particular focus, that particular site.

I: Mmhm. And my next question is more broadly about the influence of the reserve at a couple of different scales. So, the question I have for you is, what are your thoughts on the influences of the reserve on thinking about conservation? Both regionally, to people who live here and see what's happening here? I'll start with that, and my thought question is more broadly, nationally or even internationally, but we can start with the regional influence and I imagine it took some convincing for buy in- for the local community here, but I guess I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

R: Yeah, I'm not sure that I'm the best person to ask about that because not living here, I didn't know a lot of the local people who were not already somehow connected with the project. So, I do know that the family and Nina, especially, after she came back in 1979 was very concerned about bringing the local people into it, and extending to the local people, letting them know what was going on, involving them, giving them a sense of- what was happening here, so that they would realize that this was something special and something that they might try on their own land and also that they would be more respectful of what was happening here. So she was very concerned about the neighbors. I did not know very many of those people. I knew Frank Terbilcox because often, when we came up, Frank would come over. So I often saw him in those early years and of course I liked him and it seemed to me, from my limited knowledge as a historian, that he, you know, was- that it was a really good thing that he was here doing work that he was doing to maintain and restore some aspects of property in general- in the reserve in general. I'm not sure- he was doing some things on the land that's actually the Leopold land. I'm not sure, relative to what he was doing elsewhere on the property, on Reed Coleman's land or on other land that later on, the foundation sent- county foundation required. You would know more about that.

I: Yeah, there is- there were actually quite involved in projects, even fairly distant from here-

R: Oh, I know that.

I: -that I wasn't aware of.

R: Yeah, down in Spring Green-

I: Yeah, the Waubesa Wetlands-

R: -and when they began branching out to- you know, they're working in Africa, and then the oceans now, so.

I: So I'll follow up with Estella on that question, but if you can think more broadly about this idea of cooperative conservation, which I find very interesting, and, uh, has its own host of challenges and problems. So in terms of the precedent and some of the influence that this might have that a broader scale that you might be more familiar with in terms of different approaches to conservation, private lands conservation, individual tracts, cooperative conservation.

R: Yeah. This was very much a theme of Aldo Leopold's own work. It goes way back in his experience, at least to the 1920s in the Southwest.

I: Yeah, with the ranchers.

R: Yeah, working with ranchers, and the private lands that were integrated with national forest, you know on the boundaries of national forests. So he was- he was very concerned with- about that. And then, of course, when he began teaching at the university, he had- all of his students were out living in their project areas, in the communities- a farming community, usually. And he began that big project at Coon Valley, which was very much- that's where he used- first used the phrase "cooperative conservation" in the article that he wrote about what they were doing in Coon Valley, working with more than 400 farm families, as well as federal agencies, state agencies, university people, CCC, so it's very much a part of Leopold's thinking. Um, I'm not sure that that was the source of the thinking for what Reed Coleman was doing. I think it was more, in the 1960s, there was interest in land use planning, conservation easements, trying to protect open space lands. Various- various techniques for protecting open space lands. And I think that Reed was somewhat distrustful of it being done by government, and wanted to show that it could be done by private individuals. But in the case of the- and he was interested in the reserve and knew that there was a special interest and historical concern about the- about the Shack, the Leopold property, and, you know, his- and he had land adjoining Leopold's land, and he knew some of the other landowners. And I think it just made sense to him to try to get an agreement among the surrounding landowners.

I: Right.

R: Now I have not specifically gone into the history of the Land Trust Movement, but I believe that this was a fairly early land trust, at least in this part of the country. There may have been some earlier ones on the east coast. And there might have been others elsewhere too; I just haven't read up on that.

I: 1891 and near Boston was the-

R: The Trustees of Conservation and-

I: Yeah, I think that was the name.

R: Or the Trustees of Reservation.

I: Trust for Public Reser-

R: Yeah, something like that. So, I think that he was considered by people, and certainly by the media, newspapers and whatnot, as doing something quite new for Wisconsin.

I: Mmhm.

R: Getting these landowners to cooperate in protecting this land. And I believed that there was an interest in doing management, you know, in the nature of restoration also from the earliest years. I think Frank was certainly doing that. He was using fire-

I: Right.

R: -doing burning as Leopold himself had done. And I think that was considered to be quite new. I'm not sure that it was considered to be cooperative conservation in the sense that we think of it today. I think that rediscovery of cooperative conservation really came along sometime in the late 1980s or into the 1990s. And-

I: What would you- How would you describe today's cooperative conservation?

R: I would say that it's- it's community groups, local organizations that are working either on each other's land, but more likely on, you know, a stream- stream teams that are protecting streams, watershed groups that are- that are trying to talk to landowners in a particular watershed, but the group will also include citizens who are interested in that watershed. And, you know, they're organizing at the community level to work together to protect a particular place that they all love.

I: Yeah. And what I've seen here is that- and I've interviewed Russell Van Hoosen's son, John. It doesn't seem like it was all that cooperative, other than signing the agreement.

R: No, I don't think the work on the property was cooperative. I think that Frank (Trebilcox) probably talked and kept the lines of communication open with the other landowners who were a part of it, and maybe encouraged them to become part of it.

I: Yeah, they worked on it.

R: I would suspect it was- I would suspect that it was probably Frank, even more than- than Reed directly, although I'm not sure about that. But I don't recall that there were any work projects that

were involving the neighbors, for example.

I: Right.

R: I don't think that there was any of that and I think that most of the work that was being done was being done by Frank.

I: Yeah, and it seems like the other landowners, the Anchors, the Van Hoosens, it was more about the protecting the vista, or the landscape, than managing it differently than they had as farmers, small farmers.

R: Are there any people from that- those families still involved here today?

I: Uh, I called John and talked to him on the phone, and he's not. They sold most of their land to the Sand County Foundation. The Anchors have been gone for the long time; I can't find anyone who even knows anything about them, so I just went to the agricultural census record and just talked a little bit about how long they farmed. Um, Reed described him as a quiet, old farmer who wasn't much for talking. So- and I don't think he had any kids. Yeah, so I don't- um, people have been- and the Turners, maybe? Their name comes up occasionally, but I haven't been able to find anybody who knows much about that. So that's a- that's a question I have about looking forward at different kinds of different kind of cooperative conservation like you're talking about that's more grassroots-

R: Yeah. So I wouldn't take the language of today's cooperative conservation and put it back in the origins of the Leopold Memorial Reserve.

I: Right.

R: I suspect that that comes much out of- much more out of ways of protecting land that- there was a discussion of it in the 1960s. And much of it involved government and that this was distinctly not something that involved government.

I: Right. Another question I have in terms of influence is this site as an incubator for ideas about ecological restoration. So the Arboretum gets a lot of attention, but that was also John Curtis and a number of other individuals. I don't-

R: Leopold was very much involved in that though.

I: He was? Okay.

R: No question about it. He was part of the, you know, the innermost committee that was actually deciding what they were gonna do with Arboretum and how they were gonna do it.

I: But- So what was the relationship between this site and- which is a little bit more informal, but perhaps, he could be more reflective or experimental here. So what was the relationship between this site and some of his other more professional work in ecological restoration? As that field

was- it didn't even have a name.

R: This was something he was always interested in. He was doing restoration experiments on the national forests, trying to restore eroded watersheds in the 1920s, and probably earlier than that. At least from the time that he was doing all these inspections of national forests in the Southwest. You know, he'd be out there working with the local ranger, and they'd try something and start moving rocks around, and try something, and he wanted them to monitor to see what worked.

I: Yeah.

R: So he was always interested in that. And I- it became a natural thing to do with native communities at the Arboretum. When he first acquired the Shack, that came out of his interest in deer hunting with a bow and arrow.

I: Yeah, that's what John Ross told me. "I think it was as much as hunting as anything."

R: That's right. It was a hunting cabin, and you may know, that he had another- there was a precedent for that. There was another hunting cabin that he had in Missouri-

I: And that was-

R: -right on the border is actually probably right of the border in Arkansas, but right on the Missouri-Arkansas border on the (current ?) river. And they used to go there several weeks a year between Christmas and New Year's and sometimes several some days on both sides of it to hunt quail.

I: Right.

R: So I think it was- I think that was the model for getting this- this- finding a headquarters for deer hunting. But-

I: But you said the deer wasn't- there weren't that many deer there.

R: There weren't that many, but they were going- this was one of the first counties in the state that had a bow and arrow season for deer.

I: Oh, okay.

R: So they- and they were into bows and arrows at that time. So this was- you know, they wanted to be out with their bows and arrows, and you do- you spend a lot of time and you kind of need a place to sleep at night.

I: It's very painstaking work.

R: Now when he became involved and thought about actually- so he leased the property- the chicken coop was on and they began immediately fixing up the coops, so they could make it into

a sleeping quarter for the family.

I: Okay, that- that corrects my timeline because I had the- the warranty deed was May of 1935, and I thought he had been there a little before that.

R: They- he found it in February, I think, and he had- kind of had the use agreement that he could kind of use it, but he didn't actually try to- to buy it so that he could actually put some, you know, some real effort into redoing the shack until he was able to acquire it.

I: Right.

R: And... they did a little bit, but the journals are pretty scant on this; there wasn't much that you would call restoration that first year. I mean, he was getting ready to go to Germany, and was in Germany for three or four months in the fall of which- that might have been a good working time. They had done work on the building to get ready for, you know, deer season, but not so much on the shack. Then, I've been looking at his correspondence when he was in Germany, and he was visiting a lot of who had country places where they were really doing work on the land, restoring forests and wildlife habitat-

I: In the German context.

R: -in the German context. And he actually wrote to Starker that he had a mind to see if they couldn't build a little forest up there on the land, you know, what they were calling at that time various names. For a time, they called it, "Das (unclear)schloss," after the German experience at the (Ulems?) after the row of dead and dying elms along the area. "The Shanty," after the shanty down on the Current River in- on the Missouri-Arkansas border. They had a number of different names. "The Shack" came later. But I think that idea of actually beginning to work on the land, Nina says it came out of the experience at the Arboretum, and that certainly was part of Leopold's day-to-day involvement in Madison. It could've come out of the Coon Valley work, you know the restoration work they were doing there; it could've come out of the experience he had in Germany where he saw private landowners working on their own land, and I think it probably is a combination of all of those. I mean, it was- it was deep within them and he always wanted to work on his own land. I think, you know, even when he was in the Forest Service, he wrote home that he was made to live and work on his land, and whether it's a big national forest or a small parcel that he might actually own, it was all the same.

I: Right.

R: And I think- I think the roots of that, you know, were inspired by all of that activity, and they began in earnest in 1936. That's when they started a lot of the planting.

I: Okay. And so while restoration in different- so there's a North American brand of restoration that I'm learning about here that's focused on returning to a wild state, versus in a European- like a German context, I guess. Um, but from his work here, the Arboretum, Coon Valley, was- he was really one of the pioneers with this idea of ecological restoration?

R: Oh, absolutely. And I think that the people who are working in that field today look to him as the inspiration.

I: Yeah.

R: Not the only one, but certainly, he's the one that's- that they look to. And now- yeah, he was- he was very much involved in it.

I: And do you notice subtle differences, like in terms of his approach here versus at the Shack? Was he more inventive here because he felt like he could just try it and-

R: One of the things I noticed and surely you've seen this also is that he had- he had a- he thought hard about what he wanted it to be, and then he made a plan for how to get there, and he put that plan on the paper in the form of these maps.

I: Right.

R: You know?

I: He loved maps.

R: He loved maps. And this is not something that he did for the first time here. This is something that he even did, you know, for his home garden in Albuquerque. He had these garden plants. Have you ever seen them?

I: I haven't.

R: Elaborate plants. The house is drawn in, the lot, the fences, the trees, and then the garden. And what's gonna be planted and where in the garden. And it's all written down. So, you know, that was just the way he did it. He did it in the national forest when he was working with people on, you know, how to deal with an erosion problem in the watershed. And he was- he was thinking about it, he was looking at the area, figuring out a plan, and then drawing a map or a diagram of it. And certainly he did the same thing here. So he had a vision of what he thought would fit this landscape. I mean, he certainly wanted something that was- materials- species native to this area. And when he was riding the ranges in the Southwest, talking with other foresters, he was, you know, he was not just looking at what was growing there; he was aware of what had once grown there, and of what ought to be growing there. And his standard of management was the ability to bring that back. It was the restoration mindset, and it was there in the early 1920s.

I: Oh, okay.

R: Possibly earlier. Possibly- I'm not sure that we know. I know that the family were great gardeners in Burlington, and we don't know, I think- and we know that they planted, you know, they encouraged wildflowers and native species as well as grandfather's rose garden.

I: Right.

R: And I don't know. A good deal of that might have come out of that very earliest family upbringing.

I: Mmhm. And I've heard the critique about, "The red pines aren't really native." But he- my understanding is his own quotes is that he just had a soft spot for pines instead of- he wanted something probably hunting-wise as well, he had in mind. Why he put the pines- the red pines instead of deciduous.

R: You know, and at that time, red pine was what was available as planting stock. That was what was being put everywhere in Wisconsin. And he was getting that planting stock from the conservation department, and that's the- that's what everybody was putting in.

I: Yeah.

R: Usually in straight rows, and at least he wasn't putting it in straight rows.

I: Yeah, like down the road here. So it had- it was a blending of vision but reality of costs of getting these materials. He had to- to compromise a little bit.

R: I think- I think probably.

I: Okay.

R: He certainly loved white pine, and there were some white pines in this area, that's now part of the Leopold Memorial Reserve, and he certainly wanted to have those, also. I think that was his- his favorite species of pine in this part of the country, this part of the world. Although if it was Southwest, it would've been different.

I: Ponderosa, or-

R: Mmhm, yeah.

I: So I'm aware that you have to run off to Sheboygan, so I want to get to some of my last couple of questions and you'd mentioned, as you were talking about your own involvement about how you're involved- how you participate in this ongoing project. So I want to talk a little bit about where the- Leopold Reserve is today, and the vision for the future about some of these areas that you've been involved with or conversations others have, you know-

R: I would say that once I became a board chair of the foundation, which was in maybe 2003 or 4- I can't quite remember. I became much more involved in all aspects of the foundation activity and regularly attended all of the science and stewardship meetings as well. In the earlier years, those were usually held in a different time and place than the regular board meetings so I did not attend them. But I- I think, you know, am very interested in what now we're talking Leopold Foundation is trying to do with their land and they've also been doing some work on other Leopold Memorial Reserve land, I think, under contract to Sand County Foundation. And this is

in the context where Sand County Foundation hasn't been doing as much in recent years; they've been working elsewhere. And I think the kind of prairie restoration that they'd been doing, the interest in the floodplain forests, the marshes, you know, I'm fully supportive of that, and encouraging it. I think what they're doing with the Leopold Pine Island Important Bird Area, working with other landowners and public agencies that own land, is very important work.

I: And so we have the- there's these two foundations that have- different visions, same kind of kind of looks since the mid 90s that they've transitioned to-

R: Other places.

I: -to ranchers, and then to Africa. And the- so in a way, they complement each other. It's different working at different scales. The Leopold Foundation seems to be more focused on using this land more specifically as a way to spark a discussion on conservation.

R: Yes, we had long discussions about that. You know, it's very clear in our education and outreach program, we're reaching out to the broader world. But we feel that in- with our small staff, our work on the concept of land health and what it means in practice is something that we can best explore on our own land and in cooperation with our neighbors in this landscape that our staff understands and we're also trying to understand it better, of course, by encouraging even more scientific research and monitoring. But the- we're much better able to develop these ideas in this place and then in the landscapes that are nearby.

I: Mmhm. And so what's the vision for education and outreach and involvement with the community? What are some of the discussion that- that, you know, "Should we get involved in working in schools? Should we- you know, how should we focus on the Woodland School, in terms of making difficult decisions with limited staff.

R: The- you know, the Woodland School is related directly to restoration activity with our neighbors. Getting- helping them to work on their own land, providing mechanisms for cooperative work on the- on their lands. Um, working out techniques and I- so that, I think, we think of as being, at this point at least, central to our vision of fostering land health, active engagement in restoration on lands in this region.

I: I've- 'cause I'm thinking schools because I was here at the Leopold Education project and I saw you there and it looks like you've been- you were very interested about reaching that next generation, which the Woodland School doesn't necessarily do. And the Sand County Foundation doesn't necessarily do.

R: Yeah, and so we had long discussions about, what's the best way to reach out with the related concepts of land health and land ethic to a broader public? And of course, part of that is being good stewards of the legacy, this- the property, the Shack, the literary legacy, the archival material, which is now available online, which you know. So that's- that's the core, and that was the most important thing that we had to do. But then we had to develop ways of sharing it. And the principal vehicle for that that we decided would be the best next thing- the next best thing to start working on after this center was the Green Fire Film.

I: Right.

R: And that is the vehicle for reaching out to new audiences. And we are, by no means, done with it. We have the film, and it's getting a very good reception. Wherever we show it. But we have a lot more to do to develop an infrastructure surrounding that film for distributing it and for helping people who are inspired by the film to take the next steps, to connect up with other organizations, to- and I think even to develop materials that are related to the film that can help us more specifically to reach audiences that we may not have reached before. So we're talking about doing special segments, using footage that we've taken, but that didn't make it into the film on special topics that could help us to reach, let's say, into inner cities. And the focus there might be community gardens. It would probably be the theme of food, and local food. And- and then the connection between the land health and human health is another one of those themes. We... aesthetics is a very prominent theme in Leopold's larger philosophy, so something on Leopold and the arts, showing, you know, the role of aesthetics in his own thinking and the family's experience, you know, with craftsmanship. Making their own bows and arrows and, you know, building their own shack, um, with- with their hands. And so- and then people who have been inspired by Leopold to be producing art like these incredibly doors on this room, you know, which are by a local artist who was inspired when she first learned about what we were doing out here. And so... we- we're trying to continue the fundraising for- for the larger Green Fire project, to have a whole web of distribution materials, educational modules, a much more robust website than we already have for the film and for the foundation. And helping people to see the integration between many of these pieces that we've already put in place, including the archival material, which is a special interest of mine. But, you know, trying to get kids- reach kids in high school or college, you know, the possibilities of using that material and learning how to use it and also going into the field and learning how to observe. I mean there's all sorts of stuff that we can do that can- that we can use- the film, other materials that we develop in conjunction with the film, smaller segments that might be more appropriate for showing at a nature center or in a high school class or to a college group or to a community group, you know, that has only a few minutes; they don't have time for the whole film or they've already seen the whole film. So, we- we want to develop a whole lot of related material that helps us with this outreach to new communities. I'm going to be taking the film several other countries later this year: Germany, Finland and China. And I'm- I'll be very interested to see what kind of response we get because that will help to inform what we might need to do to reach audiences like that because we want to reach beyond people that we've reached before.

I: Yeah. And there's that Land Ethic Seminar Series, which seems like a natural follow-up to the film itself.

R: Yeah, sure. Yeah.

I: So, great. Well I really thank you for your time. Don’t want to hold you up anymore because I know you're busy. Um, This is gonna help round out a lot of the personal stories and things that bring a narrative to life.